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ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL
EAST TIMOR, INDONESIA AND AUSTRALIA

The Minority Rights Group, an international human rights organization, has again expressed its concern at developments in the Indonesian occupied territory of East Timor at the UN Working Group on Slavery.

Sue Roff, Executive Director of the Minority Rights Group, New York, who has followed the situation in East Timor for many years spoke of the forcible annexation and 'tragic fate' of the people of East Timor. In the years between 1976 and 1980 over 100,000 East Timorese died, either from genocidal killings or enforced starvation. The Indonesian government has restricted independent access to the island since 1975 and even international aid teams have not been allowed.

Yet the United Nations has never recognized the annexation. In international law Portugal is the Administering Power in East Timor. FRETILIN, the political organization recognized as representing the wishes of the majority of the East Timorese people, has been granted petitioning status at the UN in recognition of its strong claim to be the successor government after a legitimate act of self-determination has taken place in the territory. No such act of self-determination has yet taken place.

A most disturbing recent development has been the attitude of Australia, East Timor's closest neighbouring country. Australia and Indonesia are engaged in totally illegal talks on the prospects of sea bed exploration as now there is a strong probability of major oil and natural gas finds in these waters in the territory of East Timor. It is a great tragedy to see Australia under a Labor leadership engage in what is probably the first blatantly illegal act by this country in international law.

For the East Timorese it is yet another tragedy to be piled onto their other tragedies to thus have their natural resources stolen from them.

The Minority Rights Group urges the Working Group on Slavery to use all its powers to place pressure on both the Australian and Indonesian governments not to go ahead with any plans involving the theft of the natural resources of the people of East Timor and to put into escrow the birthright of East Timorese until they are allowed to take control of their own territory and destiny.

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For further background on this issue : MRG Report no 42

East Timor and West Irian

(press copies available from MRG above)